

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
DISTRICT OF SOUTH CAROLINA

Craig Latwain Chestnut, #333070,) C/A No. 3:10-2050-RMG-JRM
vs.)
Plaintiff,)
vs.) REPORT AND
Charles Brown, SCDC Employee Officer) RECOMMENDATION
Defendant.)

)

The plaintiff, Craig Latwain Chestnut (“Plaintiff”), proceeding *pro se*, brings this action pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983.¹ Plaintiff is an inmate at Turbeville Correctional Institution, a facility of the South Carolina Department of Corrections (“SCDC”), and files this action *in forma pauperis* under 28 U.S.C. § 1915. The complaint names an SCDC employee as the sole defendant.² Plaintiff alleges that while he was being escorted in handcuffs, another inmate hit him in the face with an unsanitary cleaning tool used to clean floors. Plaintiff claims “my constitution rights were violated by Ofc Charles Brown by not providing safety to an inmate that he had restrained.” Compl. at 5. Plaintiff seeks monetary damages. The complaint should be dismissed for failure to state a claim upon which relief may be granted.

Pro Se and In Forma Pauperis Review

Under established local procedure in this judicial district, a careful review has been made of the *pro se* complaint pursuant to the procedural provisions of 28 U.S.C. § 1915; 28 U.S.C.

¹ Pursuant to the provisions of 28 U.S.C. §636(b)(1)(B), and Local Rule 73.02(B)(2)(d), D.S.C., the undersigned is authorized to review such complaints for relief and submit findings and recommendations to the District Court.

² Title 28 U.S.C. § 1915A (a) requires review of a “complaint in a civil action in which a prisoner seeks redress from a governmental entity or officer or employee of a governmental entity.”

§ 1915A; and the Prison Litigation Reform Act, Pub. L. No. 104-134, 110 Stat. 1321 (1996). This review has been conducted in light of the following precedents: *Denton v. Hernandez*, 504 U.S. 25 (1992); *Neitzke v. Williams*, 490 U.S. 319, 324-25 (1989); *Haines v. Kerner*, 404 U.S. 519 (1972); *Nasim v. Warden, Md. House of Corr.*, 64 F.3d 951 (4th Cir. 1995) (*en banc*); *Todd v. Baskerville*, 712 F.2d 70 (4th Cir. 1983).

The complaint herein has been filed pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915, which permits an indigent litigant to commence an action in federal court without prepaying the administrative costs of proceeding with the lawsuit. To protect against possible abuses of this privilege, the statute allows a district court to dismiss the case upon a finding that the action is “frivolous or malicious; fails to state a claim on which relief may be granted; or seeks monetary relief against a defendant who is immune from such relief.” § 1915(e)(2)(B)(i-iii).

This Court is required to liberally construe *pro se* documents, *Erickson v. Pardus*, 551 U.S. 89 (2007), holding them to a less stringent standard than those drafted by attorneys. *Estelle v. Gamble*, 429 U.S. 97 (1976), *Hughes v. Rowe*, 449 U.S. 9 (1980) (*per curiam*). Even under this less stringent standard, however, the *pro se* complaint is subject to summary dismissal. The mandated liberal construction afforded to *pro se* pleadings means that if the court can reasonably read the pleadings to state a valid claim on which the plaintiff could prevail, it should do so, but a district court may not rewrite a petition to include claims that were never presented, *Barnett v. Hargett*, 174 F.3d 1128, 1133 (10th Cir. 1999), or construct the plaintiff's legal arguments for him, *Small v. Endicott*, 998 F.2d 411, 417-18 (7th Cir. 1993), or “conjure up questions never squarely presented” to the court, *Beaudett v. City of Hampton*, 775 F.2d 1274, 1278 (4th Cir. 1985). The requirement of liberal construction does not mean that the court can ignore a clear failure in the pleading to allege

facts which set forth a claim currently cognizable in a federal district court. *Weller v. Dep't of Soc. Servs.*, 901 F.2d 387, (4th Cir. 1990).

Discussion

Plaintiff files this civil rights action pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983. A legal action under § 1983 allows “a party who has been deprived of a federal right under the color of state law to seek relief.” *City of Monterey v. Del Monte Dunes at Monterey, Ltd.*, 526 U.S. 687, 707 (1999). The civil rights statute 42 U.S.C. § 1983 “is not itself a source of substantive rights,’ but merely provides ‘a method for vindicating federal rights elsewhere conferred.’” *Albright v. Oliver*, 510 U.S. 266, 271 (1994), quoting *Baker v. McCollan*, 443 U.S. 137, 144, n. 3 (1979). To state a claim under § 1983, a plaintiff must allege two essential elements: (1) that a right secured by the Constitution or laws of the United States was violated, and (2) that the alleged violation was committed by a person acting under the color of state law. *West v. Atkins*, 487 U.S. 42, 48 (1988).

Plaintiff claims his constitutional rights were violated “by not providing safety to an inmate” that was “restrained,” thus placing him “in a position of possible harm.” Compl. at 5. Plaintiff appears to allege that his Eighth Amendment rights were violated. Deliberate or callous indifference on the part of prison officials to a specific known risk of harm states an Eighth Amendment claim. *Pressly v. Hutto*, 816 F.2d 977, 979 (4th Cir.1987). Plaintiff alleges that while being escorted in handcuffs by the Defendant, another inmate struck Plaintiff in the face with an unsanitary squeegee through a cell door feeding flap that should have been locked. Not every injury suffered by one inmate at the hands of another inmate, however, translates into constitutional liability for the prison officials responsible for the victim's safety. See *Farmer v. Brennan*, 511 U.S. 825, 835 (1994). In *Farmer*, the Supreme Court defined deliberate indifference, holding that "a prison official may be

held liable under the Eighth Amendment for denying humane conditions of confinement only if he knows that inmates face a substantial risk of serious harm and disregards that risk by failing to take reasonable measures to abate it." *Id.*, at 847. The test is not whether an official knew or should have known of the possibility of harm, but whether he did, in fact, know of it and consciously disregarded that risk. "[T]he official must be both aware of facts from which the inference could be drawn that a substantial risk of serious harm exists, and he must also draw the inference." *Id.* at 837. Plaintiff alleges "Officer Brown negligently refrained from locking the feeding flap" on the attacking inmate's door. Compl. at 3. The Eighth Amendment is not violated by the negligent failure to protect inmates from violence. *Whitley v. Albers*, 475 U.S. 312, 319 (1986); *Moore v. Winebrenner*, 927 F.2d 1312 (4th Cir.1991); *Pressly v. Hutto*, 816 F.2d 977. The complaint fails to allege facts that indicate the Defendant knew of and deliberately disregarded a known danger, and thus fails to state a claim for violation of the Eighth Amendment.

Plaintiff characterizes his claim as "gross neglect and negligence and reckless disregard for a inmates safety." Compl. at 2. The law is well settled that negligence is not actionable under 42 U.S.C. § 1983. See *Daniels v. Williams*, 474 U.S. 327, 328-336 & n. 3 (1986); *Davidson v. Cannon*, 474 U.S. 344, 345-348 (1986); and *Ruefly v. Landon*, 825 F.2d 792, 793-794 (4th Cir. 1987); and *Pink v. Lester*, 52 F.3d 73 (4th Cir. 1995) ("The district court properly held that *Daniels* bars an action under § 1983 for negligent conduct[.]"). Negligence is a cause of action under South Carolina law, and 42 U.S.C. § 1983 does not impose liability for violations of duties of care arising under state law. *DeShaney v. Winnebago County Department of Social Services*, 489 U.S. 189, 200-203 (1989). The complaint fails to state a claim under § 1983.

Through the exercise of "supplemental jurisdiction" federal courts can hear and decide state

law claims in conjunction with federal law claims. 28 U.S.C. § 1367(a); *Wisconsin Dep't of Corrections v. Schacht*, 524 U.S. 381, 387 (1998). Because Plaintiff's federal law claim under § 1983 should be dismissed, this Court should decline to exercise "supplemental" jurisdiction over Plaintiff's state law claim of negligence. 28 U.S.C. § 1367(c); see *Lovern v. Edwards*, 190 F.3d 648, 655 (4th Cir. 1999) ("[T]he Constitution does not contemplate the federal judiciary deciding issues of state law among non-diverse litigants."). A civil action for negligence could also be cognizable in this court under the diversity statute, if that statute's requirements are satisfied. The diversity statute, 28 U.S.C. § 1332(a), requires complete diversity of parties and an amount in controversy in excess of seventy-five thousand dollars (\$75,000.00). Complete diversity of parties in a case means that no party on one side may be a citizen of the same State as any party on the other side. See *Owen Equipment & Erection Co. v. Kroger*, 437 U.S. 365, 372-374 (1978). This case lacks complete diversity because the plaintiff and defendant are citizens of the State of South Carolina. This Court does not have jurisdiction to consider Plaintiff's state law negligence claim.

Recommendation

Accordingly, it is recommended that the District Judge dismiss the complaint *without prejudice* and without issuance and service of process. 28 U.S.C. § 1915A (as soon as possible after docketing, district courts should review prisoner cases to determine whether they are subject to summary dismissal). **The plaintiff's attention is directed to the notice on the following page.**



Joseph R. McCrorey
United States Magistrate Judge

August 31, 2010
Columbia, South Carolina

Notice of Right to File Objections to Report and Recommendation

The parties are advised that they may file specific written objections to this Report and Recommendation with the District Judge. Objections must specifically identify the portions of the Report and Recommendation to which objections are made and the basis for such objections. “[I]n the absence of a timely filed objection, a district court need not conduct a de novo review, but instead must ‘only satisfy itself that there is no clear error on the face of the record in order to accept the recommendation.’” *Diamond v. Colonial Life & Acc. Ins. Co.*, 416 F.3d 310 (4th Cir. 2005) (quoting Fed. R. Civ. P. 72 advisory committee’s note).

Specific written objections must be filed within fourteen (14) days of the date of service of this Report and Recommendation. 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1); Fed. R. Civ. P. 72(b); *see* Fed. R. Civ. P. 6(a), (d). Filing by mail pursuant to Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 5 may be accomplished by mailing objections to:

Larry W. Propes, Clerk
United States District Court
901 Richland Street
Columbia, South Carolina 29201

Failure to timely file specific written objections to this Report and Recommendation will result in waiver of the right to appeal from a judgment of the District Court based upon such Recommendation. 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1); *Thomas v. Arn*, 474 U.S. 140 (1985); *Wright v. Collins*, 766 F.2d 841 (4th Cir. 1985); *United States v. Schronce*, 727 F.2d 91 (4th Cir. 1984).